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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Name: Robert Copeland

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12:01:00

(Off camera: We are rolling)

Q:

Excellent, the first question is always the hardest. If you could give us your name, and how to spell it.

A:

It's Bob Copeland, C-O-P-E-L-A-N-D.

12:01:12

Q:

Great, if you could give us just a little bit of background first of all um, how long have you been in the area, a little bit about your family.

A:

Okay, I think we moved here first in '42, mighta been '43. Um, before I was old enough to go to school. And my dad was the superintendent of the schools down there when Morgan Township had their own school, and Mom taught. And we lived about a mile from school. And um, I guess we stayed there for couple years.

12:01:42

A:

I went the first grade in Morgan and then they moved into Hamilton, got jobs in Hamilton, and didn't come back to Morgan Township until I graduated from high school. And came back to live with Evon Griffith, and her family, who had taken care of me when I was too young to go to school, and stayed with them until they got married.

12:02:05

A:

And then we moved to town and rented cheap houses for two and a half years until we got enough money saved to build a house, and then we built this house. And we lived here ever since '65 then. So I guess that's about it.

12:02:20

Q:

What was the area like when I was a child?

A:

That's what I told you about; it's hard to remember for sure whether it's your, it's your memories, or, I do know relatively for certain it was a community where everybody knew everybody. You know, I mean there were no people that were not known by the rest of the people out here.

12:02:49

A:

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The population would surprise you. The population um, hasn't but about doubled since, actually if you look up records, back in 1830, the population of the township was about half then what it is now, so the population really hasn't grown that much, but the population's, even though it's about twice as big as it was maybe even in the 1940s, because it hasn't grown any, from, from 1830 to 1950 it hasn't hardly grown at all.

12:03:20

A:

But the difference is that the people are more transient now than they were then, and like I said, the people, I mean most people don't know, very many people let alone everybody. You know. And then when you don't have a, a school that's, I mean we do have Morgan Elementary School, but it's not the school for the township.

12:03:41

A:

It's not where everybody goes, and it doesn't have a high school. It's not kind of a rallying point like it would have been at one time. In fact, I don't know that most people identify themselves as living in Morgan Township, you know. Um, whereas before, they would have.

12:04:00

A:

Uh, I don't know, I think they'd say they live in Okeana or they live, wherever their, I think there are five mailing addresses in Morgan Township, Hamilton and. Can't be five, yeah, four. Hamilton, Shandon, Okeana, Harrison. That's four. Yeah, right. So, I don't know. Go ahead, I'm done.

(Both laugh)

12:04:24

Q:

So when you were a kid, what did you do for fun?

A:

Well, I guess, you know I stayed with Evon Griffith. Remember I told you about her, she lived down on Race Land Road on a farm, and um, you know, I don't know how to answer that. I remember some, just some, some isolated things. I remember that uh, I used to get a red, red bandanna handkerchief.

12:04:51

A:

You know, a big, big handkerchief, and get a bullring, a bull ring's what you put in a bull's nose to lead him around with. Tie the four corners of the handkerchief to the bull ring and throw it up in the air to make a parachute and come, (laughing) come down to the ground. I, I don't know what I did for fun. I don't remember. I remember that one thing.

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12:05:11

A:

You know, and I, I do remember enjoyin' just walkin' around lookin' at things and, you know, out in the country, so.

Q:

Do you remember when they were, started building the Fernald site?

12:05:24

A:

(Shaking his head) I, I'm sure, I'm sure that I re-, remem-, I mean I'm sure I was here, uh, or, or around the area, but I don't remember, no, them building. I remember uh, I told, when I talked to you on the phone, or was it you I talked to on the phone?

Q:

Actually it was Sharon.

12:05:40

A:

Okay, when I talked to her on the phone, I remember that for the last part of the, my first grade year, we'd moved to a village there on River Road out uh, in Fairfield called Fair Play. I don't if you ever heard of Fair Play or not. I don't think anybody knows where it is but. Um, in any case, so therefore, Mom was still teaching out here, so we traveled back and forth.

12:06:06

A:

I, I finished up the year stayin' in the same school, even though we'd moved. And, and I remember about Christmas time in 1944, going by the Fernald site, now of course it didn't open until '51 or somethin', but remember goin' by the Fernald site and just at the 126 entrance. And maybe 300 feet back from the road, there was a farmhouse on fire there, and we sat there on the hill and watched the farmhouse burn for a few minutes.

12:06:37

A:

In other words, it was private property then, and I think there were several farms in there. I don't think the whole site was farmed by, by one, one person. I think it was farmed by several, several owners, you know. But I, I do recall that house burning, but I don't remember. And I know in the '50s, I remember people, knowing that people worked there, you know.

12:07:03

A:

And not really paying much attention to it. Uh, I know there was a period of time when I thought it had somethin' to do with Purina Ralston company because, as I recall, didn't they have the checkerboard, red and white checkerboard up there and it said like "Feed Material Production Center" or somethin'? I hate to admit that I was that ignorant, but I was only a kid (laughing) you know.

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12:07:29

A:

And, but I do believe I thought it was a Purina factory, you know that made dog food or somethin', you know. And then later on, as I got older, I remember 'em callin' it the Atomic factory, or the Bomb factory, or the Atomic Bomb factory, or some such thing as that. But I don't remember people ever being scared of it, you know.

12:07:52

A:

Um, I, I think I was told that there was no way there could be a bomb, an explosion there you know that, I don't remember what I was told, but know I was told it was safe as far as a bomb exploding. A nuclear bomb or something you know. But at that time, people did obviously know something about what, what was going on there.

12:08:13

A:

Um, I don't think we knew anything at all about any health risks uh, that may be associated with the site. Uh, I do, I did know people that worked there, and I do remember for sure that they must have been instructed, **I assume now that they must have been instructed not to talk about what they did because nobody ever did.**

12:08:34

A:

You know, I never heard a word from anybody that worked there about what they did there. And obviously those people must've known what they, what was goin' on, so. And, and from what I know now what was going on, it was rather innocuous.

12:08:48

A:

I mean, it, it appears to me that it was rather innocuous that basically it was a milling uh, factory where they you know, took relatively low-grade uranium and, and enriched it up to what, two or three percent or somethin'? And then milled it into different shapes and sizes needed for different things, and sent it out, so. It really didn't, didn't have a lot to do with atomic bombs I guess, but you know, I'm not sure.

12:09:17

A:

But that's, I, I remember um, when I, I went to school in Ross, and I remember they got some funding from the federal government because of the plant there. And somehow or other they counted, I don't know, they, every year they counted how many people, I can't remember what it was, but there was a count that had to do with the money they got from the federal government. Do you know what that was about?

12:09:50

A:

Yeah. They would ask the children to raise their hands if their parents worked at Fernald. (Comment - Is that what it was?) And they would count the kids to see how many kids worked at, were from parents that worked at Fernald, and they would get a certain amount of money for each child. Yeah.

12:10:02

A:

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Okay, okay. I knew there was somethin' that they polled us every year about, but I couldn't remember what it was, you know so. But I, honestly that's about it. There may be some other things I'll think of as we go on, but you know.

12:10:15

Q:

When did you find out what, what Fernald's, what Fernald's purpose really was?

A:

Well, I was elected trustee in '85 for the first time. And in um, early '86 I think, I saw where FRESH was having a meeting at the Venice Presbyterian Church, and I thought, "Well, I need to know what's going on." And so I went to that meeting and listened, and I, I was just was there to observe. And that's when I first began to find out. They were still in production then.

12:10:48

A:

I think production ceased in '89 maybe or somethin'. But that's the first, that really is the first uh, my first acquaintance with what was really, had been goin' on and was going on there. You know.

Q:

So you were elected trustee right smack in the middle of everything. Because.

12:11:09

A:

Eh, kind of at the beginning of it, because of the furor, or whatever, the public involvement never really began until that time, did it? I think. You know. So, um, I don't know.

12:11:24

Q:

So what were the reactions to, in 1984 there was a dust collector leak. (A: That's right. I remember that.) And mostly it hit the news pretty late in '84, it was like December of '84 when a lot of people starting talking about Fernald. And then just the year later you were, I mean that following year you were elected trustee. (A: Yeah, yeah.) What types of problems did you have to face as a trustee in that year?

12:11:49

A:

Surprisingly, there has always seemed, and it still seems to be um, just a curiosity, not, not alarm to, not, not that much involvement from Morgan Township people. Part of that is probably because none of our, none of our township is within the boundaries of the plant. We border on the plant. And also, possibly because we're on the western side, which is the upwind side normally. You know.

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12:12:25

A:

But I've been surprised over the years that I haven't received more input from citizens uh, as far as being concerned. Uh, I've had almost none. You know, I know, I know some people, one couple that sold their place and moved because they were concerned, and they lived about two miles from the plant. And I know that people who live on Morgan-Ross Road have been concerned for a long time.

12:12:56

A:

And I and they feel very strongly that uh, that Fernald's been the source of some health problems in their family for several years. Um, and I, I really don't know whether that's accurate or not, but other than, than those people. I've just not, I don't, I don't think I've ever gotten a phone call from anybody. Upset about the Fernald situation, you know.

12:13:23

A:

I think they're all eagerly awaiting the time when it's gonna be decommissioned and, and done, you know, cleaned up or whatever. But I, aren't you a little surprised that, that I haven't gotten as strong reaction from people? I mean, I don't know exactly why, other than reasons I stated, but. Uh, more concerned about the railroad than, that goes through the township than the plant itself, you know, so.

12:13:56

Q:

Let's talk a little bit about waste shipping because they've just in the recent years, well just in the last couple of months, they've started sending trains out to Utah and it comes right through the township. Um, how have people reacted to that situation?

12:14:08

A:

They're more, the inquiries I've got have been mostly, well what's happening? And what's gonna happen? And, and not expressing concern, but just wantin' to know what the situation is. Um, I mean, let's face it. Somebody's learned a lesson somewhere along the line, realized that if you want to do things, you keep the public involved and let people know what's going on.

12:14:36

A:

And that diffuses, cause I think the thing that gets people going is fear of the unknown. And if they know what's going on that diffuses the fear. And, and certainly nobody can accuse Fernald from 1986 to the present, whether it's Westinghouse, or FERMCO, or whoever, Fluor Daniel, nobody can accuse them of not trying to make things public.

12:15:06

A:

I mean, sometimes it's a little ridiculous (laughter). All the meetings you atten-, you're asked to attend, or invited to attend and stuff, but, I know absolutely that if they didn't do that, that there would be a huge outcry from people. Well, we don't know what's going on, we're not involved and, and they're trying to put something over on us and that kind of stuff and.

12:15:29

A:

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Ah, I think that's the reason that's it's been calm, is that anytime somebody wants to know what's going on all they gotta do is go and ask, or call somebody and ask, and it's all public. I'm not, I have, I have the feeling, I may be naïve, but I have the feeling that they're being entirely honest with us, ya know.

12:15:52

A:

Um, and I think there is still some danger there, but ah, I think they would admit there's some danger. But, ya know, they're working on it so. As far as the railroad is concerned, ah I think they're doing everything they can to make sure it's safe, ya know.

12:16:15

A:

And I think they will continue to do so. Um, and I'm not particularly, I mean, ya—there's always that potential for a ya know, an accident, but I think it's relatively safe so.

Q:

How did the DOEs interaction uh, with the public change say between 1985 and 1990?

12:16:45

A:

I don't know about the specific time period. But I think the big change is when they made the decision, like I said, to bring everything out in the open and tell people honestly what the situation was. I mean, prior to what '84, '85 it was all a big secret.

12:17:04

A:

And, and people were scared because they thought they were being lied to and, and didn't really know what was there. Now that's my perception, now that may not be correct, but my perception is that certainly anybody that has any interest at all has had more than ample opportunity to get involved, participate or just go see and hear what's going on.

12:17:28

A:

And uh, I think there are people who have health problems, and whose parents maybe, or ya know, earlier had health problems that they're convinced, maybe correctly so, were related to the facility. I really don't know if that's correct or not, uh, I mean as far as then and now, the big thing has been the public involvement and, and laying it out and letting people know what's going on, ya know.

12:18:07

Q:

Tell us about some of the public meetings that you go to. How are those run, and exactly what do you find out there?

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A:

Well, to be honest with ya I'm not the townships trustee representative to Fernald now, I was at one time, but Karl Dillhoff is, and so I seldom attend meetings now. Ah, but the ones I attended in the past, like I said, they made it very clear that if you wanted to participate in anything you were welcome to participate.

12:18:38

A:

And, and I know that I could have been on enough committees to make a full time job out of it ya know, and, and uh, so, I mean, I don't know, I don't know exactly what, what you're asking. But, certainly the meetings have been held in such a manner as to uh, they're very sensitive to the need for people to know what's going on.

12:19:09

A:

And, I don't, I honestly and truly believe if there's something very terrible that they're hiding from us there I'll be truly surprised. 'Cause I just don't get that feeling, you know. And, and it's relatively easy for Fluor Daniel to take that position too, 'cause they had no involvement in the production, you know, um, so.

12:19:33

Q:

What where those public meetings like in the early days, did you see anything that got ugly at one time?

A:

Well, that first meeting that I attended at FRESH ah, Mike Fox who was our state representative at the time, at, I'm sure he had been requested to be there by the FRESH group. And I was kind of taken aback at, at how – I, I was a little bit surprised about ah, what I felt was a little bit of rudeness by some of the members of FRESH.

12:20:07

A:

And, and have been and have continued to be, some of 'em are kind of, tend to be on the muscle and, and kind of tend to um, I think maybe overstate their case, but I'm not really qualified to make that judgement. You know, but I've, I've been a little, that's the one from the meetings; two things. I've been impressed with the fact that they're trying to be candid and I think they're being honest and open.

12:20:35

A:

And the other thing is that I've, that some of the people, I mean basically I've heard 'em called liars and, and worse you know, and, that, that kind of took me back a little, you know. I think that's kind of modified a little bit now, I believe. It's hard, it's hard to cry that they're keeping things secret from us now I think. I think it would be kind of hard to state that case and make a case for it, but I don't know. That's about it.

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12:21:07

A:

Now ah, in those early days, '85, '86 those years, um, there was a lot, a lot, a lot of national media attention on this area. (Comment - Um-hmm) You know Harry Reasoner was here, *60 Minutes*, 20/20, (Comment - Right) um, Donahue came, um (Comment - Yeah Donahue) did you participate in any of those?

12:21:29

A:

Yeah, um, trying to think where it was. I was invited to attend – I've got a tape of it in the house – it was a television program. Donahue was at Taft High School in Hamilton wasn't it. And I was working and couldn't go to that. But ah, one of the television stations in, in Cincinnati sponsored kind of a public forum and, and I attended that one. And that one must have been in '86 somewhere in that time frame.

12:22:08

A:

I could do some research and find out, like I say I've got a tape of it in the house somewhere that somebody gave me. But, yeah I, I remember all that. And, and I guess that was the poi-, that was the point at which I was most concerned. 'Cause I really didn't know, I mean I knew there was some pretty nasty stuff over there. And I still don't understand how we allowed ourselves to be a repository for, for waste from the Belgian Congo, you know.

12:22:38

A:

I mean, don't quite understand why the government would (chuckle) would allow waste to be shipped over. I mean uh, apparently 'cause they felt there might be some retrievable assets in that waste, but turns out if there are, they were never retrieved, you know, and now it's a real problem, so. Don't quite understand why that was done to this day. You know. I think that's accurate, is it not?

12:23:03

A:

Yeah. I mean I've heard stories about diamonds and stuff in there, but I don't think that was, I think it had to been some nuclear, component of that waste that mi-, the government must've felt might be, valuable some point. Do you know? (Q: Um.) I mean I know I'm not interviewing you, but.

12:23:22

Q:

No, no. That's, that's, that's a story that's sort of been going around in the, sort of the rumor mill, the legend mill, you know, there's legends that there's precious jewels and gold and all that kinda stuff in there.

A:

Well, I don't believe.

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Q:

And actually, in, in that type of waste that actually came from Niagara Falls, the project up there, there was gold in it. I mean not a whole lot. It would take an awful lot to get it out, but it was there, sure.

12:23:41

A:

Yeah. But that isn't why the government would've allowed that waste to be brought over here and, and, and put in pits here.

Q:

No. It was the Belgian Congo's waste, and they actually put it in the silos. And they had an agreement with the Belgian Congo that they would hold it for so many years and then it would be, it would go back to the Belgian Congo.

A:

Oh, is that right?

Q:

Well, when it came time to go back to the Belgian Congo, the Belgian Congo said, we don't want it.

A:

That was pretty smart of 'em, wasn't it? (Both laugh)

12:24:08

Q:

Yeah. So now we're stuck with it. (Laughs) And that's mostly the waste that's in the silos.

A:

Yeah.

Q:

That's, that's where it is. You're right. You're correct (laughs).

12:24:18

Q:

Um, you mentioned, you know, sort of the legend thing, what other kinds of stories, legends, rumors, those kinds of things, have you heard through the years about Fernald?

A:

Like I said, now looking back on it, I'm impressed with the security in terms of people not talking about what they did there. 'Cause I've known several people that worked there, and I've never had a discussion with any of them about what they did there until after the p-, production was shut down.

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12:24:50

A:

You know, so. I mean I assume that they must've been told in no uncertain terms, that this is, you know, not to be discussed with fam-, family and friends, and, and perhaps e-. I don't know, but I would assume they had to have some kind of hammer, because they just didn't talk about it, you know.

12:25:11

A:

Um, but I, I pretty much told you everything that, that, that I know, or am aware of in, you know, during the time that production was going on. Which isn't much, you know. I remember uh, where Neiman's own now the, the farmhouse up above the plant there? I remember my dad always wanted to buy that, always, always wanted to own that, that house there, that farm?

12:25:42

A:

And uh, but, I remember that, it was for sale, sometime in the '60s. I think there was like eighty acres in there or somethin'. It was for sale real cheap. And, and it was because o' the, the plant bein' down over the hill there, you know. Uh, I think that whole farm was for sale for twenty thousand dollars, I believe.

12:26:08

A:

I mean my wife and I looked at it before we built this house, and I think it was twenty thousand for eighty acres, I believe, so. But I think probably one reason we chose not to do it was because of that plant bein' down there and not knowing exactly what was goin' on there and what impact it might have on us, you know, so.

12:26:31

Q:

Let's talk a little bit about property values. How have they changed throughout the years and how does that link with Fernald?

A:

To be honest with you, they've changed dramatically over the years, as they have almost everywhere else in the country. And I don't think it links to Fernald at all. Uh, no, I'm, you're talkin' about in Morgan Township.

12:26:52

A:

I, I don't know about Ross Township or Crosby Township, but as far as Morgan Township is concerned, I think they were right on when they did the study several years ago and came up with the conclusion that property values are not impacted by the Fernald situation.

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12:27:10

A:

Uh, I mean it's like I told ya earlier today, I know that across the road here, there was forty acres for sale back in, '69 ('69 or '70)? That I, I could've bought that forty acres for ten thousand dollars; two hundred fifty an acre, no money down, six percent land contract, twenty year payoff, and didn't buy it, you know.

12:27:37

A:

And if, if that same land were for sale now, (laughing) it would be worth instead of two fifty an acre, it would be worth ten thousand an acre, you know. So that's a forty-fold increase in twenty-nine years. Uh, and typically, farms around here back in the, in the '60s, would've sold for three, four, five hundred dollars an acre, and now you can't find a farm for sale. There aren't any. You know.

12:28:09

A:

And if you, like, I know a friend of mine sold a hundred nineteen acres over by uh, Morgan Elementary School. That's a kind of a problematic piece of ground because it's got a railroad runnin' through it, and a creek running through it, and only a thousand feet of frontage on a hundred nineteen acres, and pretty, pretty rough ground, but the main problems are the railroad and the creek.

12:28:32

A:

And, and I think he sold that for five thousand an acre with no improvements whatsoever. Um, and I know his dad owned that farm back in the '50s, and I, I know that, that farm wouldn't a, that piece of ground wouldn't a brought twenty thousand dollars, back in the '50s. And at that time, there were, a hundred and thirty some acres there.

Q:

So the property values have gone up.

12:28:57

A:

Yeah. And I think it has virtually nothing to do with Fernald, either positive or negative. I'm, I'm relatively sure of that. I can, I can be wrong, but well, I think we'd all agree it's had no positive impact. But I, I'm just convinced as I can be that it's had no negative impact either.

12:29:17

A:

Now, there, you take Morgan-Ross Road, and that area in there, what people tell me is that if they got property for sale there, there are some people that won't buy it, because of Fernald being so close. But it doesn't seem to have an impact on price because there are other people who will. You know, so.

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12:29:40

A:

But I, I'd have to say that there may be some portions of Morgan Township that're negatively impacted because their proximity, but I'm not really aware of 'em. And, and you'd have to be awful close before it would be any factor, you know.

(Tape ends abruptly)

Tape FLHP0129

(Off camera: tape's rolling)

13:01:03

A:

I want whoever's lookin' at this tape to realize how humid it is out here this morning.

(Everyone laughs)

Q:

Well, we're almost done. (Laughs) That's a good thing. I wanna back up just a little bit and you were telling us about uh, some of the site workers that you knew. And uh, if you did ask them what they did at Fernald, what would they say?

13:01:22

A:

Truthfully, I don't ever recall ever asking them. I don't, I don't recall it ever being an issue. Uh, I knew they worked there, and they called it the Bomb Factory, you know, that's what. I don't mean the people that worked there called it that. That's what it was called in the community at that time, and, and, or the Atomic Factory.

13:01:44

A:

And, uh, this would've been when I was a, a kid, you know. And, and I just don't remember it being an issue. But I, I am aware now that there was never any discussion about it, which, but I never asked. I don't ever remember asking. I used to be around a guy that worked there quite a bit, and, and, I just don't remember. I do not remember, but I do know that I didn't hear anything about it.

13:02:18

A:

Uh, I mean they had to have known. The people that worked there had to have known what was going on. And had to have known, had to have understood what part of the, of the production of, of nuclear, um, I guess bombs or nuclear weapons. They were involved in and had to have known that it was, as far as a nuclear explosion was concerned, that it was safe, you know.

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13:02:47

A:

Um, but I, the thing that I remember is that there was never any discussion of it (laughs). That's about it. And I don't recall ever asking anybody, you know, what they did. Maybe I wasn't interested I don't know. Just don't remember, you know.

13:03:05

Q:

Now all this sort of happened at the height of the Cold War um, what was the typical American's mindset during the Cold War?

A:

I, I can't tell you about typical American, I can tell you mine (laughing). You know, I guess we all didn't, my father-in-law owned this house across the road, and in the '50's he built a bomb shelter. It's still there, I mean a real bomb shelter with lead doors and, and, and entryways that go (begins demonstrating with hands) in and then change directions and, and its own water, you know it had a little cistern in there.

13:03:44

A:

And uh, you know it's rather intricate bomb shelter. Um, and I mean he was convinced that we were gonna have, we were gonna be attacked you know and I think, you remember in schools ah, what was it tuck and roll, what was it they told you to do. Duck and duck and cover or something like that, you had to get down under your desk and put your hands on your heads or something, I don't remember.

13:04:10

A:

Do you remember, have you heard about it? Yeah, wasn't it duck and cover? Isn't that (Comment - I think I remember) what they called it. Yeah, okay. I remember doing that. And, and but of course as a kid you don't think anything bad's ever gonna happen to you, you know. So, I, I don't recall, I know that I wasn't personally alarmed about it, it was just like a fire drill as far as I was concerned, you know.

13:04:32

A:

Uh, but I do think probably that the average adult felt that we were in imminent danger, of, of maybe not imminent danger but danger at some point of being attacked, you know. Ah, and I guess to be honest with you I'd have to say I, I think that's almost inevitable. I mean at some point. Isn't it? I feel like it is, (chuckles) I don't know.

13:05:00

A:

Sometimes I ponder the situation and, and ah, when you have not, not just second world countries but third world countries getting the bomb, and now for what ever reason now we're at North Korea has potential three stage rockets so they can, they have, they may have the ability to, to go around the world with nuclear weapons. I mean when North Korea has that ability, sooner or later something's gonna happen isn't it.

13:05:30

A:

You know, but that's got nothing to do with the Fernald situation. Uh, they had, remember they had ah, bomb shelters set up in various places, like Cincinnati the old what was suppose to be ah, it goes right

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along Central Parkway – I forget what they called that. The inner urban or something that never got off the ground they, they had bomb shelters in those, excavated areas that ah, I, they're all sealed off now aren't they, I don't think.

13:06:05

A:

And then in schools there were (demonstrates with hands) schools that had placards, Civil Defense, you know ah, shelters. I think that was for potent-, it was for tornadoes and stuff like that, but I also potentially for nuclear attack wasn't it, I believe. So, I think there was ah — I think probably the mind set was that certainly it's a distinct possibility that we'd be attacked, but.

13:06:37

Q:

I'm glad you mentioned the Civil Defense thing, 'cause a lot of people have never mentioned that and I always think "gosh that was all over the place."

A:

Yeah.

Q:

Those big placards that said CD (Comment - Right) and they use to do um.

A:

They were yellow and black weren't they.

Q:

Yeah, uh-hmm, and they use to do all these ah, drills to get people out of town (Comment - yeah right) you know how would we get these people out of town if this happened (Comment - yeah) and they had this whole thing set up and they would do drills and stuff.

13:06:56

A:

Well now we've done that for because of the Fernald situation, (laughing) we've, we've had those drills now (laughing).

Q:

Tell us about that.

A:

Well, in Morgan Township what every (chuckling) what everybody that I've talked to says to heck with those drills we're gonna head for Indiana (laughing). I mean, I think forget what the drills called for, but the drills called for going some place closer to the site. Um, and, and I don't think people are

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gonna do that (laughing). I think if there's a problem down there we're all gonna head west as soon as we can (laughing) you know, so.

13:07:28

Q:

So how was all that set up, is it like an evacuation route or something like that?

A:

Yeah, they, they we had ah, Saturday morning exercises ah, with you know, staged by the Fernald facility and, you know we stood by in case we were called, and that kind of stuff. It's been so long ago I, I don't remember very well, but it was ah, and I know they had routes set up. Irene Lewis, the Civil Defense director had, had drawn up, I think, I think it was she, had drawn up escape routes or evacuation routes or something like that.

13:08:06

A:

And I think generally people are going to ignore that and they're gonna go where they want to go, you know. So, and where I would want to go is as far away from the problem as fast as possible (laughing) you know, so.

Q:

So those drills were in result of a problem at the plant?

13:08:23

A:

Yeah, they, they, because of the potential problems at the plant, you know. Uh, you talked about the, the leaks, you know, the ah, what they call it, escapes. I don't, you know, where ah, radioactive escaped through the air and landed on, presumably landed in neighboring ground and so on. Ah, I don't know. I don't know what danger they had in mind to be honest.

13:08:53

A:

You know, but they, they were concerned about it at one time and now I don't hear much about that anymore, do you? You know I don't hear any talk about escape or evacuation or whatever. So I don't know if those elements are no longer involved or whether they, I don't know. You'd have to ask somebody else that, you know. But I know, that did, that did go on for a period of two or three years, so.

13:09:21

Q:

Yeah, I don't think they do that much anymore.

A:

Yeah.

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Q:

Now ah, Fernald has set up a, a joint response system with many of the surrounding townships. Could you tell us a little bit of how that got set up and how it works.

13:09:33

A:

Really don't know because we were not really that involved in it ah, Tony Sears is a trustee and also a fire chief and, and I believe he attends those meetings to represent us and I don't know, don't know that much about it. I know, I think I know correctly that Fernald ah, your life squad ah, I've been told that they respond to all Ross Township calls. Ah, I don't know who you participate with Crosby.

13:10:12

A:

Ah, but I, we know that for mutual aid you're there if we need ya, but I don't recall that we've ever used ya. Uh, don't know that we've ever needed, needed too. But you know, I guess we're getting along reasonably well. Ah, I think we have the same problem that everybody else does in getting volunteers.

13:10:34

A:

In fact, starting just about exactly a year ago, we st-, we were havin' trouble getting' people durin' daytime hours Monday through Friday because, let's face it, most of, most of the volunteers are younger people. In their twenties and thirties, forties, maybe, and they've got families and they need income.

13:10:56

A:

And so a lot of 'em that we were depending on were getting jobs and, and not being available during those hours and so we, we instituted a program where we pay from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, we pay five dollars an hour to three people to be on call. Not on station, but on call, during that time.

13:11:23

A:

And we put a levy on the ballot in November of last year to fund that, and it passed by almost eighty percent. And so we, we assume that means people are satisfied with what we're doin'. But, and I assume the time will come when we're gonna have to go to paid um, on station department, you know, for life squad.

13:11:49

A:

Now, fire department, um, there, there's not nearly, there're not nearly as many fires as there are life squad runs. We have I, I, every year it varies but we have from two hundred to three hundred fifty life squad runs per year. Transport runs. We have a lot more runs than that, but a lot o' times they don't transport to the hospital, you know. And, you're averagin' pretty close to one a day then.

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13:12:20

A:

And uh, I, I think we have somewhere in the vicinity of thirty uh, fire, fire department runs, and they're not structure fires. I think we had three structure fires in the township last year, and that's the most we've had, for a long time. You know, no, maybe we had four.

13:12:43

A:

But I mean, what I'm saying is, life squad is, is, I can't say it's more important. I don't wanna say it's more important because when your house is on fire, that's important, but it's a lot more, it's a lot more utilized than the fire department because there are a lot more calls for emergency services than there are for, for fire. You know.

13:13:06

A:

Uh, and I, I think fire department, most o' their, probably the most o' their calls are automobile accidents or carbon monoxide runs where somebody's alarm's goin' off or they actually have a carbon monoxide problem, or uh, grass fires, you know, that kind o' stuff.

13:13:28

A:

Or any more, we get a lot o' calls from people, their neighbor's burnin' somethin' and they're not allowed to do it and they, they, they call us to take care of it for 'em, you know. And they call them controlled burns, you know, so. I don't know, what was your question? I forgot.

(Both laugh)

Q:

You answered it. Um, there, uh, how do you feel about the site cleanup right now? What's goin' on at Fernald right now.

13:13:56

A:

Well, what, we had a meeting last night, and Mack um, was there, _____ and also uh, Bob uh Heck, Vice President I think was there? And um, what impressed, they told us last night that the uh, silos that have recently been covered with a urethane type material or foam of some kind, to try to slow down the emission of radon. They're gonna put the material from those silos in um, steel tanks.

13:14:35

A:

In 2003, I think it was. And, and uh, I mean, that's four years, from now, you know (laughs). I ju-, it, what impresses me is how slowly things work. But I know the reason for that, I know the reasons. Part o' the reason is money, because they seem to only be able to get about what, two hundred seventy, two hundred eighty million dollars a year from the federal government, and they can't spend money they don't get.

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13:15:06

A:

And um, and a big part of it too, I think, is that they wanna make sure what they do solves the problem instead of creates another one, you know. And uh, but let's face it, I'm not likely to be alive when that situation is completely remediated. Even in their best scenario, don't they talk about 2015, or 2020 somethin' like that.

13:15:34

A:

And uh, well maybe I'll live to be eighty, I don't know, but (laughs) I wouldn't wanna bet on it (laughs). So, I mean, I guess that's the thing that impressed me, is how, how long term a project this has turned out to be. Actually, the cleanup is gonna take as long as the mess up took, you know. (Chuckles) It's gonna take 'em about as long to clean up the mess as it took 'em to create the mess, you know.

13:16:01

A:

Which seems, it's surprising. And the money they're gonna spend. Billions o' dollars, you know. When it's all said and done, aren't they? You know billions. What's that like Ev-, Everet Dirkson said, remember? "A billion here, a billion here or a billion here, a billion there. Pretty soon it adds up to real money." Do you remember that, or have you ever heard o' him? Yeah (laughs). But that is a lot o' money. So that, that, that's it.

13:16:33

Q:

How do you feel about the On-Site Disposal Facility?

A:

As long as they put in what they plan to put in, and, and, let's face it, it's, it's, if there ever was an over-engineered facility, that will be it, you know. Or, appears to me that it will be. I, I forget how many layers, different layers there are, but it's in the thirties or forties or somethin', different layers of things. You know, like plastic and bentonite and, and that kind of stuff.

13:17:01

A:

And if they only put in there what they plan to put in, I mean, nobody can guarantee anything's safe for a thousand years, and that's what they're shootin' for, I believe. But, I'm not concerned about it. I mean, I, I'm a little concerned that they're gonna put some stuff in there that's not supposed to be put in there. Either inadvertently, or through you know, short-cuttin' the process or somethin'.

13:17:32

A:

I, I don't know, but uh, if they do it the way they're talkin' about doin' it, I think, I don't think it'll cause a problem for the community, you know. There is one thing I wanna ask you.

(Both chuckle)

Q:

Okay.

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13:17:47

A:

I never could understand, I don't know if you were working here at the time, but several years ago, they floated publicly the idea of building concrete containment structures. Uh, and they actually proposed three or four different sites for these concrete containment facilities. They were above ground, and I never could understand why somebody would, would've made such a proposal.

13:18:18

A:

It didn't fly, and I felt at the time that it, it was so preposterous there's no way it would fly. But I never could understand wh-. Camp Ross Trails was one of the potential sites for those. And a site on, in Morgan Township across Morgan-Ross Road was another potential site.

13:18:39

A:

I think there were two or three other potential sites. And uh, I never could understand why anybody proposed that. Uh, you got any, any insight on that?

Q:

That must've been before my time, because I don't ever remember that. Yeah.

A:

Okay. Yeah. They sure did.

13:18:54

Q:

Because I mean I, I know there was a lot of discussion about what to do with um, you know, construction rubble more than anything. They didn't know what they were gonna do with that and then.

A:

This was like waste from the pits and, and the silos and stuff, as I remember. They were talkin' about buildin' like 3-foot thick concrete wall buildings and floors. I don't know, very thick concrete floors, and just puttin' 'em in. And I, I remember thinking and I remember saying, "Well, if you're gonna do that, why not just do it on the same site? Why go, why go to another site and mess that up?"

13:19:32

A:

You know, it didn't make, it doesn't make sense. There's gotta be. I think it was a red herring of some kind (chuckling). I'm not smart enough to talk, smart enough to know what the red herring was, but they couldn't o' been serious I don't think.

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13:19:45

Q:

I can find out for ya.

A:

I'd appreciate it.

Q:

Sure, I can, I can uh, do a little bit of research into that and get an answer for ya.

13:19:50

A:

I know the, the, the head of, I don't know if it was Westinghouse, was, was operating the facility at that point. But the head man on the site came to our meeting, and, and the discuss-, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss this proposal. And I never did understand it. I felt there's no way this is gonna happen. You know, it's so preposterous. Why are they subjecting us to this, you know. Yeah, if you can find out, I'd like to know.

13:20:26

A:

I mean I, at that time I remember thinking, well they must be, this must be uh, somethin' to throw us off the trail (laughing). They, they're plannin' somethin' else and wanna throw us off the trail and get us to fight in this so they can do. I don't know. I never could understand it, it just seemed stupid to me, you know. And I mean it never came to fruition. I mean it died almost as quickly as it came up.

13:20:52

Q:

Well, I'll find out for ya. I'll do a little bit of research. I know quite a few people who have been on site for a long time, I can ask that question.

A:

Okay. Okay. Okay, well, Camp Ross Trails was one of the more preposterous, potential sites and then one across the road in Morgan Township from Morgan-Ross Road. And, they never really could pinpoint the site there.

13:21:12

A:

They couldn't tell us, and I think it was because they really didn't have a, a specific, they had a general area in mind, and. I don't know, but Camp Ross Trails was a specific site, you know, so.

Q:

Yeah, well, I'll find out for ya and give you a call (laughs). (Comment - Okay.) That's kind of bizarre. (Comment - Yeah.) Um, now you mentioned that you know, by the time they get everything cleaned up, it's gonna be into the 21st century pretty far. Um, now they are tearing buildings down pretty quickly. What would you personally like to see that land used for once it is all done?

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13:21:53

A:

I, I guess I'd like to see it used for whatever it's, it's most suited to be used for. Uh, I mean, I, I really, I really don't know. I mean I don't know what it has the potential of being used for. I think the community would be really happy to have that 1,050 acres um, excluded from any residential construction.

13:22:21

A:

Because you know how it is, everybody gets their little dream home out in the country and they want that to be the last one built. You know, I don't know if you're aware of that or not, but, but (laughs) when, when people move out in the country, they, they feel like the view that they see from their windows is, is their private property even though it's somebody else's private property.

13:22:43

A:

And they, they really quite understandably don't want any more houses built, you know. And I think it would, I can't imagine they would ever use it for residential construction. I think there may be some commercial construction there. Uh, and I don't think there's a need for a thousand acre park.

13:23:05

A:

Um, I, I really don't know, but I, I do know that people would not want there to be residential development there. You know. Or I think I know that. That's about it, you know.

Q:

So um, how would you feel if um, they decided to put some type of Cold War museum there?

13:23:31

A:

Uh, It wouldn't be any problem for me. I, you know. Uh, I don't know if it's inapprop-, I don't know enough about that kind o' stuff to know if that's an appropriate site or not. Um, Cincinnati's not the biggest city in the country, you know. And whether that's the, you know, I don't know. Somebody else'll have to make that decision, because I. But it wouldn't offend me in any way if they put it there.

13:23:57

A:

You know. Um, I, I think the R-, school district would like to see something there that's gonna generate some tax money, you know. Um, and they, I think the school district has a point there. I mean, when you take a thousand, of course they've been receiving impact money over the years.

13:24:20

A:

I don't know how much, I don't know whether it's very, whether it's as significant as it would be if that were turned into some kind of development. I, I don't know. Somebody else'll have to answer those questions, but I know the school district would, needs revenue, and would like to see some revenue off that facility, or off that site, you know.

13:24:40

A:

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Um, but I, I'm very content to leave, that's the thing when you get a little bit older, you're very content to leave decisions like that to other people (chuckling). You don't, you don't feel like you have to make every decision in the world, (laughing) and I'm very happy to leave that decision to other people, you know. But I do think they would be advised, well advised to not allow residential development there.

13:25:06

A:

Uh, there's such a demand for golf courses. I can't believe it. I mean, there must be five times as many golf courses now as there were thirty years ago, or forty years ago. Um, it surely would be a, I would think that would be a, a use for a significant number of acres that would satisfy everybody, you know. Particularly if they made the tee-off free for 30 year residents (laughing) or somethin'.

13:25:41

A:

That'd be, that'd be real popular. I'm not a golfer by the way, but I know it's getting' pretty expensive. I have friends, and they, the thing that limits their golfing activities is the money it costs to golf, you know, so.

13:25:56

Q:

You're not the only one who's suggested that (laughing). We've talked to quite a few people like, "Ah, make, make a great golf course!"

A:

Well, and let's face it, they could plant trees, uh that have the potential of bein' valuable in 50 or 60 years. You know what I mean, it's good, it's good productive soil. Um, and you know, peop-, you've heard the old cry about farmland preservation? And I've, I've got a biased perspective on farmland preservation.

13:26:32

A:

People don't really care about farmland preservation. What they care about is green space. You know, they, they don't, in this country, we have so much, we have so much production potential now that we have to feed the, ourselves and the world and still have too much production.

13:26:51

A:

I mean, are you aware that corn for example, right now, is less than two dollars a bushel, and in 1948, corn was two dollars and twenty-five cents a bushel. I mean, farmers can't make any, I mean the only money there is in farmin' now is what the government pays you. That, that's it. They're, they're, I can't believe that anybody in traditional farming is making any money.

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13:27:19

A:

And certainly not enough money, not as much as they could make if they quit farmin' and got a job on a farm. But I'm, right now the farm economy, if the general economy weren't so good, the farm economy would be in depression, you know. But a lot of farmers have, big farmers have gotten jobs off the farm to get enough money to continue to farm, you know.

13:27:43

A:

And, so farmland preservation is a red herring. You know. uh, and, and when people talk about it, it's just, it's just a mask. What they really mean is green space. You know, they want their preserved green space. And, um, you know, that, a lot o' that could be used for farmland.

13:28:06

A:

But I don't think that'll turn anybody on because they really, they just wanna make sure it's undeveloped, or developed in a limited fashion. But, that's good farm ground. A lot o' that site is good farm ground. You know, for this area, anyway.

13:28:20

A:

Um, I never, there would be no reason, I, I don't believe there would be no reason if, if, if we were suddenly having problems raising enough food to, to uh, feed ourselves or feed the, you know if we needed more production, that would be a place where it could be done. Uh, but I don't think in my, in my lifetime, that's never gonna come.

13:28:43

A:

I've been, for the last forty years at least, I've been thinkin' sooner or later, people are gonna realize, ah, there's gonna be more and more people and there's gonna be a need for more and more food, and one o' these days farmers are gonna make money.

13:28:58

A:

Well, I've given up on that concept because the reality that is even though there's less farmland in production now than there was thirty years ago, the yields have escalated to the point where there's way more production than there ever was.

13:29:14

A:

And if the financial incentive were there, uh, I mean, 10, 10 billion bushel corn crop in the United States is a good yield, and I, I'm convinced if the need were there, we could raise 20 billion bushels, you know. If, if the economic incentive were there. If corn was five dollars a bushel, why heck, I'd grow corn, you know (chuckles). I mean, a lot o' people, you know what I mean?

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13:29:42

A:

If the, if the economic incentive were there, the production would be there.

Q:

You would do it _____.

A:

There's really not a shortage of farmland at all. Even though that's a popular, don't you agree that's a popular misconception?

Q:

Oh, yeah. We've heard from a lot o' people like that. Are we at the end of our tape here? Go ahead and pause.

(Tape pauses)

13:30:02

Q:

Have quiet on the set for just a second. We're gonna go ahead and roll. This is nat sound.